

# **Maximizing EIL Competence through Students' Agency, Voice and Inter-subjectivity**

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## **Bio statement**

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## **Abstract**

The express purpose of this paper is to alert English language teachers/ educators across cultures and continents to a host of issues and insights that underlie socially attuned/ constructivist approaches for maximizing EIL competence through students' agency, voice and inter-subjectivity.

An unhealthy preoccupation with collecting evidence for language learning appears to have led many of the English teachers to view language learning as 'a reaping or harvesting act'. This is because researchers, policy-makers as well as teachers, in the rationalist/positivist tradition believe that competence in language learning is synonymous with closure-focused task(s) aimed at producing determinate/fixed meanings/outcomes, which are universal, measurable and quantifiable and therefore, justifiable.

The accruing objectivity of inputs and outputs can run averse to our beliefs and value systems in that it not only stifles the agency, voice and subject hood/inter-subjectivity of our students but can also preclude them from coming to terms with the quality of their language learning experiences. It is only by moving away from calculable thinking and closure-focus in our educational practices of English language teaching can we understand the power and promise that a constructivist understanding of competence holds for fostering voice and agency in our students and us alike. To this end my paper will focus on an array of beliefs, intuitions and value-systems which should help us challenge traditional/conventional SLA's preoccupation with the mastery of forms as a basis for development and measurement of competence and proficiency in language. In doing that, traditional SLA theorists appear to conceptualize competence and proficiency as approximation to a linguistic code rather than a phenomenon in which learners cross the border of their first language into a second in order to reconstruct their selves and world.

## Introduction

The endless cycle of idea and action,  
Endless invention, endless experiment,  
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;  
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;  
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.

Choruses from the Rock, T.S. Eliot

Needless to say that the lines quoted above serve as a mood setter to this paper, they alert us to the prevalence and practice of language as an incomplete construct given the fluidity, provisionality and indeterminacy of the meanings that we encounter in its use. By the same token, the lines beckon us to interrogate our unhealthy preoccupations with language, which condition us into viewing it as a complete, measurable, reductive and value-free construct for the purpose of legitimizing our conceptualization of competence as a scientific objectivity of inputs and outputs. Regrettably, such a stance, which is synonymous with a Newtonian view of nature and a Cartesian search for certainty (Toulmin, 1990; Polanyi, 1958), appears to have hegemonized our language pedagogies and practices much to the detriment of students' voice, agency and inter-subjectivity in the bygone era.

I wish to argue that the resultant intellectual posture, which examined knowledge independent of context and social experience, is rather unbeneficial, especially in the New Millennium underway, where our ideas of nature and society are subject to frequent change and re-inquiry. Given this, we are inevitably positioned as well as poised to re-examine and re-dimension our notion of students' competence in English as an international language (EIL) with its declared mission of creating "a heterogeneous global English speech community, with a heterogeneous English and different modes of competence" (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 211). This, I believe is in keeping with the primacy and centrality of our aspirations and practices in the teaching of EIL. Therefore, it is my fond belief that this paper could provide the stimulus and synergy that we as EIL practitioners need in order to democratize and dehegemonize our understanding and conceptualization of competence in English across the cultures and continents of the world. Hence, I will examine the theoretical orientations and perspectives relevant to this paper with reference to their affinitive and affiliable aspects/qualities that support my intuitions, beliefs and value systems. The views that I, then, wish to examine in this paper should be interpreted as intuitive beliefs and values that support my intuitions and belief systems underlying pedagogies of experience and response.

Therefore, it is not necessary to affirm these views as outcomes of rationalistic inquiries just for the sake of labelling them as ‘objective’. In keeping with my voice, belief and agency, I contend that what is touted as ‘objective’ in language learning research has harmed our educational and social practices. Therefore, I will argue that theoretical possibilities indicating suggestive ways for attempting alternate conceptualizations of students’ competence in EIL should remain unequivocally subjective, dialectic if necessary, as language is not an objective field of inquiry. Furthermore, as asserted by Eagleton (1983, p.14), ‘the claim that knowledge should be value-free is itself a value judgment’. Such an assertion not only points out the naivety of researchers who relate language learning to scientific research paradigms but also alerts us to the futility of objectifying and reifying competence in language learning research (Polkinghorne (1988, p.x). In light of this, the vibrancy of students’ agency, voice and subjectivities underlying their EIL competence lies in their fluid, indeterminate and temporal manifestations and hence they will always be value-loaded and not value-free.

## **Negating an Asocial View of Community and Context**

In order to maximize our students’ competence in EIL, we need to grasp the primacy and prominence of the context within which we attempt our theorizing and conceptualization of competence. In light of this, we should encourage ourselves into looking at context not as an atemporal/objective reality but as one that comes into existence as a consequence of the interplay of discursive practices initiated by ‘the teacher of a continuity and community of shared understanding with learners’(Candlin and Mercer in Candlin and Mercer, 2001, p.7). In keeping with this position, I have argued elsewhere (Sivasubramaniam in Nunn and Sivasubramaniam, 2011, p.51) that the shared understanding accruing through discursive practices can facilitate a pluricentric view of community rather than a restrictive, reductive view of it in addition to signposting a notion of competence/literacy that is duly enriched by its ‘context-bound characteristics’ (Bailey and Nunan in Bailey and Nunan, 1996, p.2). A pluricentric view of community, then, regards context, continuity and charity as its inviolate attributes in that it makes a bold attempt to integrate the learner and his/her larger social world into a dynamic and ever dynamizing whole (Norton, 2013). I hasten to suggest that at this juncture, I am aware of another competing notion/ nomenclature: individual networks of practice (INoP) popularised by Zappa-Hollman and Duff (2014). While, I appreciate the vibrancy and effusiveness of the notion, I am not convinced that networks of practice can exist without

individuals/practitioners coming together in collaborative as well as participatory mediations in the pursuit of social construction of meanings. In light of this, I believe that my notion of community, context and continuity are in sync with Vygotsky's notion of mind in society (1978). By the same token, I am of the view that InoP can neither replace nor substitute a Vygotskian notion of community which is the over-arching ethos of my paper. In a Vygotskian sense individual networks of practices cannot thrive without practitioners coming together as a community. This, therefore, makes it inevitable for me to factor in at this juncture, a socially-aligned and sociolinguistically sensitive position, which for the purpose of understanding students' competence will view language as:

...the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity is constructed (Weedon, 1997, p.21).

### **Coming to Terms with the Inadequacy of Modernist Assumptions in Language Education and its Consequences**

Our attempts and actions directed at maximizing students' competence in EIL demand that we come to terms with the inadequacies of modernist assumptions in language education (LE) and its unwholesome consequences. The hegemonic prevalence of modernist assumptions in the teaching of English has conditioned us into viewing language as: a closed system, a cognitive deficit or cognitive deposit (Gass, 1997, Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; Sivasubramaniam, 2000). By the same token, we were led to believe that for the sake of promoting objectivity, we as well as our students should not countenance subjectivity. In retrospect, such a position was meant to serve as justification for negation of intrinsic meaning and the human agency accruing in our students' use of the English language. As a result, the role of English in LE largely has come to be viewed as 'a psycholinguistic objectivity of inputs and outputs' (Breen in Candlin and Mercer, 2001, p.307; Kramsch, 2002).

Such a position appears to have characterized the learners as passive recipients of knowledge, who could then be easily conceptualized as programmed information processors. Consequently, our students have been socialized into a process of language learning that is predicated on correct grammar and comprehension instead of individual response, expressive use of language and hypothetical thinking. This appears to prompt and promote calculable

thinking in our educational settings, which views as well as interprets educational outcomes in terms of a rationalistic-technological stance. The following views of Lehtovaara (in Kohonen et al 2001, p. 145) serve to illustrate the devastating effects of such thinking on our current practices of LE:

According to this line of thinking, schools are often seen as production plants, curricula as production plans, students as raw materials, products or customers, teachers as production managers or producers of 'educational commodities' and so on. Further, in the interest of measurable efficiency and the accompanying quality control, schools, teachers and students are forced to compete against each other for resources and power. This development results from a one-sided view of man and also maintains this view. People tend to be seen as nothing but competitors, successes or failures, winners or losers.

There appears to be a mismatch between what science projects as a rationalistic representation of life and the real, personally meaningful lived life of the human being. This is to suggest that the quantitatively measured, value-free knowledge of science is fundamentally different from the personalized and the perspectival knowledge that human beings live by in their everyday real life. For this very reason the conceptualization of competence in language learning attempted by the rationalistic – scientific epistemology (van Lier, 2004) in quantitative approaches fails to account for the lived through experiences of the teacher and the students (Candlin and Mercer in Candlin and Mercer, 2001; Kohonen et al, 2001; Norton, 2013). The following views of Kramsch (2002: xi) can help support the point in focus here:

The focus is on language learners as language users in natural environments where their activity creates the affordances (or not) for language acquisition. Such an orientation represents something of a departure from mainstream studies of second language acquisition with their preference for experimental designs in the instructed site, their focus on monologic or at best dyadic data, and their reduction of language- even where there is consciousness of pragmatics-essentially to the mastery of forms.

Having said that, I am aware that there are some LE contexts/settings that have managed to resist the hegemony of positivist persuasions, especially in the practice of English for academic purpose (EAP), by addressing concerns of learner autonomy and learner-centred environments that are synonymous with the social turn in SLA (Block, 2003). Such prevalence, I believe, has helped mitigate those practices of EAP which in other words were seen as "a smoke screen for colonizing students' minds" (Alan Maley, personal communication 2012). The discussion here is reminiscent of an interesting 'convention-departing narrative' (Canagarajah 2002) which signposts examples of Sri Lankan scholars making bold attempts to blend in their voice and agentive practices with perceived prescriptions of Western scholarly objectivity. This can be seen as a bold avowal of

subjectivity in EAP, which is otherwise believed to be a prescriptive domain of practice. By the same token, I need to voice my avowal of L1 in SLA, which has been denigrated by Chomskyan linguistics and its idealised view of competence. Chomskyan idealizations of competence have precluded traditional SLA theorists, even us, from coming to terms with the uniqueness of our learners' social and cultural constraints (Sridhar, 1994; Canagarajah, 1999). In light of the issues and insights that I have discussed in this section, I now believe that our alternate explanation of competence in EIL can only be a tenable rather than a tenuous one, if we make a bold departure from mainstream SLA as well as its preoccupations with (Kramsch, 2002: xi) calculable thinking and its rationalistic/idealistic quantifications of students' competence. Therefore, I propose to present an alternate explanation of competence in EIL in the following section of this paper.

### **An Alternate Explanation of Competence in EIL**

An alternate explanation of competence in EIL is synonymous with a socially- aligned view of language, which stresses its social and (inter)subjective nature. Therefore it debunks and disavows a calculable, quantifiable, objectifiable, asocial and atemporal view of language. This is to suggest that we need to come to terms with language as: an open/expansive system, a fluid/indeterminate construct, an expression of human activity in all its variety and illogic and an index of sociocultural involvement of/by the human user (Polkinghorne, 1988). Given that the research data in education is usually obtained from human beings, the compulsions to quantify them as seen in a rationalistic epistemology reduce human beings to test scores, mean scores, and experimental objects (Bailey in Byrnes, 1998, pp 81-82). This is reminiscent of the hostile and uncharitable ways in which we have characterised our students as test scores, statistical items and grammar production units and "correct answer spouts".

For many years now we have only seen our students as voiceless, non-agentive and valueless objects manipulable only for a host of institutional practices and protocols that have subjected them to a banking model of education (Friere, 1972, 1973). Given this, it is high time that I entreat my readership to attempt a critical epistemological shift in order to empower our students into finding their voice, agency and inter-subjectivity. This can accrue only if we teach our students how to shift away for the monologic discourse practices of a traditional teacher-fronted classroom to those practices that espouse dialogic imagination as a basis for fostering agency, voice and subjectivities via the opportunities available for collaborative and social constructions of meaning (Bakhtin, 1981 and Bakhtin, 1986). Needless to say that language teaching is a form of education, any research into it should be viewed as educational

research as it poses fundamental questions about the nature of human experience. Such a realization will/can help us then to function professionally and responsibly (Brumfit and Mitchell, 1990). Most importantly, we will then be better placed and poised to understand our students' agency, voice and intersubjectivities as manifestations of their competence in EIL and how to maximize it in the educational practices of EIL.

## **Students' Voice, Agency and Inter-Subjectivity**

Having argued for an alternate view of competence that would in conferring voice and agency to students help them maximize their competence, it is necessary here to discuss what we mean by students' voice, agency and inter-subjectivity. According to Crookes and Leher (1998, p.320):

These are joint goals, the simultaneous development of English communicative abilities together with the ability to apply them to developing critical awareness of the world and the ability to act on it to improve matters.

The view expressed above encourages us to consider any attempt by students to break free from prescriptive practices as indications of agency, voice and subjecthood. Thus, the expression of voice evolves from the Freirian imperative to restore to marginalised groups their stolen voice, to enable them to recognize, identify and name things in the world. The belief that written language can work as a 'detached and self-referential system of meaning' is neither facilitative of our students' agency, voice and inter-subjectivity, nor tenable in EAP/ESP prescriptions as any other English classroom practice that take a key-hole view of their competence (Sivasubramaniam in Nunn and Sivasubramaniam, 2011). The fostering of agency, voice and inter-subjectivity would then entail encouraging students to propose and present their knowledge through a personalized use of language instead of a depersonalised one. This makes it imperative that we factor in a socially aligned view of competence, which in keeping with its performative and transformative aspects: articulates the social nature of human beings, functions as an instrument to create meanings anew/afresh, assigns centrality to the involvement of human agency and transforms the lived through experience into an adventure of significance and drama (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Language-learning experiences are far beyond the predetermined goals of a language curriculum. Externally imposed syllabuses, textbooks, and examinations all define educational values and set

certain standards, which are important from the standpoint of the individual as well as for national and social purposes; however, they make the spontaneity, flexibility and diversity which are an equally important part of education much more difficult to achieve (Skilbeck 1982b, p.20). Given this, spontaneity, flexibility and diversity can accrue only through a process-centered pedagogy of voice, agency and response, which is synonymous with constructivism as an educational value system.

Constructivism as a metaphor means understanding knowledge and learning through experience (Pelech and Pieper, 2010 ; Onuf, 2013). As a philosophy of learning it emphasizes the premise that by reflecting on our experiences we construct our own understanding of the world we live in. In doing so, we make sense of our experiences by constructing our own mental models to interpret new experiences (Reagan, 1999; Osborn, 2000). The underlying value and belief systems, I believe, are highly conducive to and supportive of our students' voice, agency and inter-subjectivity as they are consistent with a constructivist account of language. A constructivist account of language competence is then understood as representational and therefore, figurative (McRae, 1991; Gibbs, 1994); dialogical and therefore, expansive (Bakhtin, 1981); immanent and therefore, semiotic (Peirce in Buchler, 1955).

At this juncture, it will be useful to further examine the above stated position via the two diametrically opposite/bipolar metaphors that have gained currency in the teaching of English: acquisition metaphor( AM) and participation metaphor( PM). AM likened learning to **computers** and **containers**. Such a metaphorical projection compelled us to think of knowledge as a '**commodity**' that is accumulated by the learner and to construe the mind as the **repository** where the learner **hoards the commodity**' (Sfard, 1998, p.5). Such a position is reminiscent of Freire's (1972) banking model of education, which in light of all that I have stated so far is untenable in the new millennium. According to Freire the banking-model of education is one where the teacher's primary objective is to deposit information into students as they would deposit money into a bank. Such an approach as mentioned by Freire (1972, pp. 46-47) has the following characteristics:

- The teacher teaches and the students are taught.
- The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing
- The teacher thinks and the students are thought about.
- The teacher talks and the students listen.
- The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined.



- The teacher chooses and enforces his choice and the students comply.
- The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher.
- The teacher chooses the program content and the students adapt to it.
- The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students.
- The teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.

In contrast, PM ‘defies the traditional distinction between cognition and affect, brings social factors to the fore, and thus deals with an incomparable wide range of possibly relevant aspects’ (Sfard, 1998: 12). PM necessitates a shift in our focus from ‘language structure to language use in context, and to the issues of affiliation and belonging’ (Pavlenko and Lantolf in Lantolf, 2000). To know a language, then, is how one learns to use it or to live in it like a bird in a nest. In this sense, a computational/container view of language is not language at all. In light of this, PM chimes in with constructivist learning environments which I believe to be ideally positioned and poised to promote students’ agency, voice and intersubjectivity. The following characteristics constitute an antithesis to AM and the banking model of education in that they envisage constructivist learning environments enhanced manifold by PM which (Pelech and Pieper, 2010; Onuf, 2013) :

- Encourage multiple representations of reality.
- Avoid oversimplification to represent the complexity and diversity of the real world.
- View knowledge as ‘constructed’ not as ‘given’.
- Emphasize authentic activities and meaningful contexts.
- Focus on real world settings and non-linear instruction.
- Provide stimulus for reflecting on experience.
- Articulate context-bound characteristics of knowledge.
- Acknowledge collaborative construction of knowledge through interpersonal associations/negotiations.

Current metaphors in SLA such as, ‘**association**’, ‘**manipulation**’, ‘**conditioning**’, ‘**treatment**’ and ‘**system**’ appear to characterize it as an **asocial enterprise** in that human beings have come to be viewed as laboratory-based objects that have no agency and subject hood (van Lier in Candlin and Mercer, 2001, p. 90). Interactions in language-learning contexts are complex sociocultural processes and they should be looked at in a more

inclusive rather than an exclusive way. Such a need is well represented in the prevalence of metaphors such as, ‘communication’, ‘negotiation of meaning’, ‘co-construction’, ‘cooperative learning’ and ‘responsive teaching’, in our current practice of language education.

Learning opportunities for meaning constructions go far beyond the traditional notion of input and its comprehension by the learner. Semiotic resources such as expressions of appreciation, empathy, understanding, and a host of other meaning making activities that represent students’ creative and critical thought are unwelcome to traditional SLA theorists (Kramsch in Lantolf, 2000; Langer, 1992; Cairney, 1990). However, our preoccupation with collecting evidence for language learning has led us to view language learning as ‘a reaping or harvesting act’. In doing that, we have not paid any attention to ‘the sowing’ that precedes reaping. As pointed out by Bronfenbrenner (1979) our focus has been turned away from person, process, context and time in that our preoccupations have centred on reaping statistical analyses and numerical measures (Wittgenstein, 1980, Bakhurst, 1991).

Our students as human beings can create signs to direct/control their behaviour instead of being controlled by their environment. In this respect, only they as human beings can use signs to initiate response/reaction or to refer to other human beings or objects (Wertsch, 1985a and b). Arguably and demonstrably this is what constitutes their voice, agency and inter-subjectivity. This is what underlies the formation of their identity. This stream of thinking appears to tally with what van Lier has observed (in Candlin and Mercer, 2001, p.90):

To continue looking for operationally defined, discretely measured, statistically manipulated and casually predictive variables would be to approach one job with tools that belong to another. It would be like going to an archaeological site with a combine harvester or like shining shoes with a nail file.

As I have mentioned earlier in this paper, our preoccupations with a calculable and quantifiable view of competence has misled us into believing that our students’ need to be closure focused individuals in order for them to be seen as competent performers. Closure-focused students have come to be seen as idealized human beings by researchers in the rationalist/positivist SLA tradition as they believe that learning is a closure-focused task aimed at producing determinate/fixed meanings, which are not only atemporal and universal but are also measurable and quantifiable and therefore, justifiable. This then begs the question: who are competent students? Competent students cannot be and should not be closure-focused individuals given the issues and insights that we have discussed so far.

Competent students are those students, who might not look upon their texts as fixed artifacts. Instead they would use them to construct meanings to overcome the problem of fixity a text might impose on them. Competent students perceive their reading and writing as a space for constructing their own attitudes and opinions through “elaborative processing” (Beach in Lawson, Ryan & Winterowd, 1989, p.187). This set of views and issues can attest to the complementarities and commonalities that operate in the conceptualizations proposed by Nunn (2015, this volume) wherein students’ competence is seen as divergent outcomes and as consequences that accentuate centrifugal/ representational meanings rather than centripetal/ referential meanings that underlie a simplistic/ unitary meaning of competence.

## **Accrual of Students’ Agency and Voice**

Agency and voice can accrue only when we show students how:

- To decouple their writing form its text-centric and technological aspects it imposes
- To argue in favour of a pluralistic view of competence/literacy
- To promote social involvement so as to encourage a pluricentric view of context, community and culture

If students in an EFL/ESL class believe that completing an assignment is mainly intended for scoring a pass grade, then they would view their assignment as a tool to get the task done. As a result, they would believe that there is nothing more to their assignment in terms of learning needs. This position is reminiscent of ‘survival orientation’ (Breen, 1987, p.26), which students get accustomed to for want of motivation to go beyond the instrumental purpose of completing the given task.

If the students view their assignments as a sign, which can be interpreted and related to other signs, it would influence a multiple creation of texts besides contributing to a dialogic atmosphere in class thereby influencing a diversity of utterances/interpretations (Bakhtin, 1981). In light of this, we need to understand that texts can make sense to human beings only through the possibilities that interpretive practice (Sivasubramaniam, 2004) offers and not through a literal, decontextualized message-centered language orientation. Therefore, students should be encouraged to:

- View the signs of a text as discursive and dynamic meaning making elements which can be changed or replaced by their signs.
- Focus on the semiotic context of the original text, read their personal life experiences, their roles as readers, reviewers, critics and promoters of their readings and writings.
- Look at the texts they read not only indicatively but also symbolically.
- Identify the worldviews of the texts they read and how their reactions to the texts could point out the provisionality rather than the fixity of the writers' positions on their respective worldviews.

It is only through a process of social involvement can we foster and sustain a pluricentric view of community and culture which are central to our students' voice, agency and subjecthood. Given this, there is inevitable need for us and our students to develop a facilitative, associative and negotiative approach to pedagogic discourses in their reading as well as writing practices failing which they will be prevented from understanding how contextual changes impact on their perceptions of pedagogical imperatives, especially in a continuous community of practice context typical of a university (Sivasubramaniam in Nunn and Sivasubramaniam, 2011).

Academic writing practices seen through the prism of SLA's preoccupations with norm-based performance is not only asocial but is also educationally distempering to our students as these practices have stifled our students' agency, voice and subject hood (Haque, 2007). In light of the key issues that I have so far presented and discussed, it is possible to free students from the shackles of academic prescriptivism by encouraging them to respect their subjectivities and use them as a basis to promote inter-subjectivities among them. This would foster a culture of collaborative, interpretive and participatory practices in a community that avows its faith in continuity and charity- notions that permeate our understanding of social justice and its prevalence in the classroom. The semiotic mediations of students signposted and elaborated upon by Unger (2015, this volume) can provide confirmatory support for their attempts to resist academic prescriptivism.

SLA research, which claims to account for second language learning, has not been able to provide a convincing explanation of affect in second language learning situations. In this respect there appears to be 'a gap of significant proportions' in SLA research (Shanahan, 1997, p.166). How then are we justified in supporting SLA's prescriptive recipes and routines for both conceptualizing and assessing our students' competence much to the denigration of their voice, agency and inter-subjectivity? Far from coming to terms with the manifestations of their voice, agency and inter-subjectivity as indexes of their

competence, we have chosen to uphold SLA's traditional norm-based prescriptions as the be-all and end-all of our students' assessment. Are we not, then, guilty of inflicting social injustice on our students much to the detriment of their voice and agency (Haque, 2007; Kramach, 2002; van Lier 2004)? Yes, we are to a great extent. Given this, we need to make atonement for our academic excesses and this I believe demands us to factor in a constructivist approach to assessment.

## **A Constructivist Approach to Assessment**

The Mastery Model proposed by Ames and Archer (1988, pp. 260-267) can support a constructivist approach to assessment. According to Ames and Archer, the Mastery Model is a framework for measuring a student's performance by comparing it to a set of criteria. When students are led to believe that mastery is a goal of learning, then the students will invest their efforts to reach the criteria that indicate their level of mastery. Such a belief system will make them feel engaged and involved with the process of learning thereby motivating them to learn for learning sake. On the contrary, when learning is judged as a norm-based performance, it induces a feeling of loss of self-esteem and inferiority complex in them. Viewed in the light of social and educational issues underlying this paper, norm-based performance is not only asocial but is also educationally disempowering to students. In this sense, a norm referenced concept of learning encourages a sense of unhealthy competition which forces students to view one another as rivals and so, they should outperform one another to prove their superior learning ability. Norm based exams like TOEFL as well as institutionally standardised exams make the students believe that learning is a closure- focused task aimed at producing determinate/fixed meanings, which are not only atemporal and universal but are also measurable and quantifiable and therefore, justifiable. In this regard, these norm-based exams project closure-focused students as idealized human beings. However, such a categorization may not be able to account tenably as to what extent these idealized human beings can propose and use intrinsic/alternate meanings as opposed to extrinsic and fixed meanings that the standardized exams appear to yield. In light of this, any conceptualization of students' competence accruing via the normative route of assessment is minimally informative and maximally redundant (Sivasubramaniam, 2004).

As an antidote to the disempowering effects of norm-based/prescriptive exams, I wish to illustrate how an alternate framework of exam can facilitate and foster students' agency, voice and subjectivity as manifestations of competence. The following excerpts from the exams that I have used with both PGCE and B.ED students majoring in English Method can provide some support for the issues I have argued about in this paper. However, I hasten to state that the excerpts and strands of data furnished below should be viewed as 'illustrative stretches' (Willett, 1995: 480) of discourse the students produced (in the two exams they wrote: MTH12- Method of English and Scaffolding Texts-SCT-411) rather than atemporal affirmations of objective knowledge.

I am aware that the data presented might come across as a small sample, the same that can infuriate quantitatively orientated SLA researchers and devotees. However, as argued by Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p.156):

There are no guidelines in qualitative research for determining how many instances are necessary to support a conclusion or interpretation. This is always a judgment call.

Based on my judgment call, I understand that a single incident or instance is sufficient to build a conceptual category. By the same token, the best insights might come from quite a small amount of data. The following views of Bleich (in Cooper, 1985, p.261) provide further support to my position:

More is known about response and reading processes from small numbers of detailed reactions than from large numbers of one- word judgments. In this way, the process of teaching the development of detailed subjective response is simultaneously research into the nature of response processes.

In light of the points raised above, I believe that the illustrative stretches can help elucidate how students' agency, voice and subjectivity accrue via exams that are more learner-centered as well as facilitative of response.

*\*\*\*The names of student have been shown in initials in order to keep them anonymous.*



**UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE  
FINAL EXAMINATION  
OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2013**

MODULE NAME : METHOD OF TEACHING ENGLISH

MODULE CODE : MTH 412 (PGCE)

DURATION: 3 HOURS

MARKS: 100

LECTURER(S) INSTRUCTIONS TO STUDENTS (OPTIONAL):

ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS

1. Based on the lectures you have attended and the classroom activities you have participated in MTH 412, discuss your views on the Personal Enrichment Approach to Literature in language teaching in about 700-800 words.

Your answer should signpost your personalization of the issues and insights that you have picked up from MTH 412 in addition to your voice and agency. You should neither use an impersonal tone nor a depersonal style of writing anywhere in your writing and so, remember to use the first person singular 'I' throughout. (30)

Student 1 -BFL

What is the Personal Enrichment Approach? The personal enrichment approach is aimed at creating a love of reading among learners. It includes the reader as being an active part in the process of reading and understanding different text. In the teaching of language the Personal Enrichment Approach (hereafter PEA) is based on reader – response. (Sivasubramaniam, p.2006). The main idea in PEA is to make the reader feel that his/her understanding of the text is important to them. Literature in the MTH 412 course. During the teachings/lectures I felt encouraged to read. This encouragement was not brought on by being submitted to assessments and getting good grades. It was brought on by

developing a love for reading. As I engaged in the group activities with my peers we sometimes found that our understandings of a text were diverse but valid. There was never a time when I felt that my contribution was invalid or treated with disregard. By allowing learners a sense of individuality and motivating them provides encouragement. There are many different strategies to teaching students how to read, but without motivation all efforts to teach students to read will fail. (Hunter, 2005). I have learned that allowing students to have a sense of choice in what they read also acts as a motivation to explore different types of texts. In my assessments in the course, I was constantly asked to write. And I have realized that a love of reading is interconnected with the love of writing. From a personal perspective I believe that it is important that learners have the skill of reading and writing in order to be well read. I have also bared witness to the fact that reading should not be assessed like any other subject matter or activity. Students should not be assessed on the notion of what is considered to be a 'correct' reading and what is considered to be an 'incorrect' reading. Students should be able to explore different meanings associated with text without the fear of being wrong. And as learners and students make sense of what they read negotiation comes to the foreground.

#### Student 2- NKL

A famous myth that many South Africans laugh at, is that if you want to hide anything from a black person, hide it in a book. In my response to the question, I will define what this approach means to me, the benefits of this approach and will discuss different views associated with this approach. I was taken aback especially because he is a "Doctor", I am putting inverted commas because he emphasised for me that as Professor Siva would say, many people and institutions brag about so many graduates produced. They fail to tell us how intellectually bankrupt those are. This emphasised for me that the scores and literacy have no real connection. It is at such a moment of realization; I understand the value of a personal enrichment approach to literature in language teaching.

#### Student 3- AB

In this essay I will be discussing the Personal Enrichment Approach to literature in language teaching. I will then discuss the Personal Enrichment Approach in relation to extensive reading and practice reading, which is nurturing and motivating to a learner. I will relate these fundamental aspects to the semiosis of language as a literature. I believe that Personal Enrichment Approach to literature in language teaching is a fundamental issue,



which is not taken serious enough. Learners should be taught to become motivated into extensive reading as a practice, in order to develop a love for reading. This would benefit them far beyond their current cognitive abilities, creating intelligent individuals and future leaders of this country and world. They would not only look at sentences or any text in all possible ways, but also look at the world critically.

#### Student 4 - CN

The Personal Enrichment Approach, allowed me to view literature in language as an endless meaning making machine, where affordance should present itself at all times. Through classroom activities and discussions, I was able to see reading as a collective of signs, which regulates behaviour as well as serve as a stimulus where the values, relationships and emotions were continuously emphasized. Aesthetic reading promoted the notion of signs, where the use of gestures, exclamations and body language is used to convey meaning. I have learnt that through the Aesthetic reading approach, learners are able to develop critical thinking skills where collaborative learning and participation is taking place. Literature is depicted as a social discourse where different meanings are being conveyed and it reduces provincialism among our learners as their minds become richer due to the process of semiosis. Through the Personal Enrichment Approach, I was able to relate the signs given in a text and observe how the process of semiosis and affordance was emphasised. During my teaching practical, I had to teach a lesson on polysemes and homonyms. These are words that sound and spelt the same but have more than one meaning. An example of this was “play” and “train”. The learners had to make two different sentences using these words to convey their different meanings. Play can refer to games or a drama whereas a train can refer to transport or gym. Through this notion, the process of semiosis was present and learners could see the endless meaning making process. The Personal Enrichment Approach is quite significant as I believe it emphasises the emotional release where spontaneity can be expressed.

#### Student 5 -HN D

I have learned that the way I read has a purpose, my reader – response is an outcome of how I connect to the text. After every lecture, I felt as though I left after 3 hours somehow more knowledgeable and ready to face the world. This has been my feeling since the first day. Literature is not only a text that needs to be read or taught to a class full of students. Literature should be personalised and then thrown out to the learners, I have learned that as

teachers we have the responsibility understand the text and then fully explain it to our learners. The Personal Enrichment Approach to literature in language teaching, as I have learned this year, taking the text, personalising it and making it my own by understanding it and then teaching it to the learners. The learners then receive a text that is far richer than the original. When doing my teaching practical in July (August) I used many of the techniques that I learned in the 7 months of this course. Othello was not me or the class reading and discussing the text and the characters. I used what I learned at school and how MTH 412 taught me to personalise literature. Othello was a text that spoke to my thoughts and the thoughts of the author. This experience allowed me to see that if I understand something I can explain better. (Sivasubramaniam; 2006).

#### Student 6- NCL

Firstly, I need to establish the definition of the Personal Enrichment Approach. This view promotes the idea that a literary text can be made 'richer', due to a learners dynamic interaction with the text (Sivasubramaniam, 2014). Learners are encouraged to look at their unrehearsed responses to text, as these unrehearsed responses hold expressive potential. (Rosenblatt, 1978). I need to stress that what makes the Personal Enrichment Approach work is the de-emphasis of one right reading and one right answer, which leads learners to engage in multiple readings of the text (Brumfit, 1986). I believe that what makes the Personal Enrichment Approach interesting, is the idea that learners may experience some anxiety and demotivation because they are challenged by the open-ended meanings found in the text. However, the great thing is, that this anxiety can be solved by performing the acts I have previously mentioned, such as engaging in multiple readings of the text, not believing in one right reading or one right answer, and by focusing on the expressive potential of the unrehearsed response. Now that I have established what the Personal Enrichment Approach entails, I will discuss my personal views regarding this approach. What I love about the Personal Enrichment Approach is that it encourages unrehearsed responses and subjective meanings. It acknowledges that there may be anxiety and demotivation but its mechanics allow the reader to let go of the anxiety. If I had to think back to the type of classroom activities that we did in the class, I can honestly say that some of those activities echoed these tenets. Prof. Siva asked for our opinions, our views, and our understandings on a range of topics. For example, one discussion topic was, "What are the benefits of Literature?" I was confident in my group discussion because no answer was considered wrong, which was so refreshing. We were all

allowed to share our views and he did not shout at us, and tell us we are wrong. He therefore did not resemble the traditional teacher in the “banking model of education” (Freire, 1972).

2. Provide a tentative assessment plan for a reading lesson you have taught and justify the how and why of your assessment. Your answer should relate to your understanding of the personal enrichment approach to literature in the teaching of reading.

#### Student 1 -BFL

To assess the reading progress of the learners I will use more democratic approaches. The learners should feel that their opinions matter to them. I will ask learners to do a series of self-assessment which will include keeping logbooks, writing responses and discussing what they have read with their peers. These strategies allow students to work on their reading ability on their own individual pace. My job as the teacher will be to evaluate the student's performance based on his/her own assessments. I will then attempt to motivate learners with positive gestures like, ‘Well Done’, ‘you are making good progress.’ If students feel a sense of support they are motivated to do more and improve their reading ability. Students will become intrinsically motivated to read and when they reach that point I can gradually withdraw my support and promote their independent reading so that they can become independent thinkers.

#### Student 2-NKL

Overall I posed my questions in such a way that the learner engages with the text, that the learners are able to relate to the text. I also wanted to ensure that from the text they take away among other things, the importance of healthy eating as my question 10 is directed at the learner and his or her family. In question 9 I asked the learners to give synonyms. I added that question to encourage expansion of their vocabulary, without directly focusing on grammar. I learnt during my time as a learner and during practice teaching that, walking into a class teaching kids synonyms or tenses can be boring, I wanted to fuse it with literature.

### Student 3- NKL

I most certainly make use of journals and response papers. Learners should have the liberty to speak and have their emotions on paper. In other words, allowing the learner to have a voice. When learners or children have the freedom to write what they please, they develop a relaxed concentration and I would then get more emotion and effort from their journals. I would also make use of response papers, whereby I would provide the learner with an article and they would have to write about their understanding on the article. Another means of reading, is to give a learner a picture, and they would have to read the picture and tell me about it on paper. This would allow learners to develop a love for reading, because they have become their own authors or narrators of a journal and response, they would want to know more. Reading motivates writing and writing motivates reading.

### Student 4- AB

My assessment strategy focused on the reading strategy where pre reading, during reading, the post reading strategy was being implanted. Through this strategy, I was able to take learners on a journey thus preparing their thinking skills. The questions posed was to emphasise the different cognitive levels of the learner. I wanted the learners to be exposed to lower, middle and higher order thinking skills. The range of questions focused on the language text based approach as well as critical thinking questions where learners were given the opportunity to convey the Aesthetic reading approach of signs. (Pike:2004) argues that one effective plan ensures you can put your creative ideas for a text into practice.” With regards to this, the question regarding colour scheme was evident of creativity as well as effective planning as the learners were given freedom to express their view and ideas regarding colour and the role and different dimensions it plays in a text. The ultimate purpose of my assessment was to promote the use of the Personal Enrichment Approach to the literature of language and how learner’s performance can be conveyed through this notion.

### Student 5 - CN

When I read this text I felt transported to these hills, I could feel how these wildflowers were supposed to smell. I want my learners not only to read texts in order to complete the questions. They must be able to understand the text in a way that allows them to be able to explain the events in the text to bystanders after the task has been completed. The questions I

have created, I believe go beyond that of a comprehension. These questions require that the text be understood before they can be answered. Comprehensions do not require the learners to read and personalise the text. They are simply a list of questions to ensure that the learners can read. In my teaching I aim to go beyond testing to see if the learners can read and comprehend. I want to ensure that they have felt the text and believe what they are writing. The questions I set up, require that the text is read, re-read and personalised.

#### Student 6- CN

I will provide an assessment plan for the reading lesson and I will justify the how and why of the assessed. The first criterion will be 'Task Orientation'. I will look at whether the learner answered the question. In other words, did the learner do what is asked of him. The learners answer must directly address the question. This will be out of 10. The second criterion is 'empathy'. I will look at whether the learner was able to put himself in the shoes of the character, and view the world from the characters perspective. This will be out of 10 marks. The third criterion is 'media transfer ability'. I will look at whether the learner is able to adequately transfer the information of the text to other formats, such as a song or diary entry. This is out of 10 marks. The next criterion is 'understands the text'. I will look at whether the learner actually understood what was going on in the text. My first few questions are very content-based, so this criterion will be effective. (10 marks). The next criterion is 'the ability to hold an argument. I will specifically look at the question about the debate of traditional medicine versus western medicine and assess whether the learner can build up a good argument. (10 marks). The next criterion will be 'mental picture awareness'. I will look at whether learners are able to build a mental picture in the absence of descriptive words. I will assess whether they are able to use their faculties of imagination adequately which I think is very important for every reader. (10 marks). The next criterion is 'social awareness'. I will look at the gender question and ascertain whether the learner is aware of social issues in society, and the dominance attributed to the male voice. (10 marks).



UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE  
FINAL EXAMINATION  
OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2013

Module Name: SCAFFOLDING TEXTS 411  
Module Code: SCT411

## INSTRUCTIONS:

You need to answer both questions in Section A and Section B. In all, you should answer four questions. Your answers should signpost your personalization of the issues and insights that you have picked up from SCT 411 in addition to your voice and agency. You should neither use an impersonal tone nor a depersonal style of writing anywhere in your writing and so, remember to use the first person singular 'I' throughout.

## Section A (Responding to Language in Literature)

1. Read the following Seen Poem and answer the questions that follow:

If

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too;  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

2. If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;  
If you can meet with triumph and disaster  
And treat those two imposters just the same;  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,  
And stoop and build 'em up with worn out tools;
3. If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
And never breathe a word about your loss;  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew

To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold  
on";

4. If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common  
touch; If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt  
you;  
If all men count with you, but none too  
much; If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And - which is more - you'll be a Man my  
son!

Rudyard Kipling

Write an analysis of the above poem (400- 500 words) and comment how the poet's use of language signposts the values and belief systems that constitutes his exhortations/ his inspirational advisory. (25)

Student      1-  
AVT

The poem under discussion is a poem by Rudyard Kipling named 'IF'. To me the poem speaks about a belief-system of values which is treasured by the poet and which he wants to pass on to his son. Looking at the title it has come to my notice that 'IF' is a title of uncertainty to a certain degree. What I mean by this is that the poet writes about things that could or could not have a possibility of being met. In the first few lines of the poem the poet brings out values of rationality. E.g. 'If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you'. To me these two phrases / lines speak about keeping or holding on to one's humanity or personality. It also speaks of a rational mind-being able to remain level-minded in the face of chaos. So far in this poem I have noticed that the poet's values and beliefs are strongly related in his fashion of writing. He writes in a conversational style and gives attention to the inter-alia / fluency of the poem. It is not very dense, but is designed in such a way as to personally appeal to each reader. Where the language is concerned, I would like to highlight certain things. The first words that caught my immediate attention was how the two words 'triumph' and 'disaster' were linked and called imposters. I assume that the poet called them imposters as the one can turn into the

other unexpectedly and vice versa. As is, they are very fickle and not to be trusted.

#### Student 2- AT

The following will be a critical analysis of the poem 'IF' by Rudyard Kipling. I will also comment on how the poet uses language signposts the values and belief systems that constitute his exhortations (encouragement or urges to do well) his inspirational advisory. The poet takes an advisory role to an imaginary audience of willing listeners and speaks about what he feels, after his experience in life, what is needed to become a good man. The poet discusses any issues in the poem, namely that of humility, honour, respect, the will of God and forgiveness. I feel that the poet has a strong belief in the virtue of patience or example he says 'If you can wait and not be tired by waiting', here he shows that it is important for men to have a sense of calmness and patience. I believe the poet has a strong belief in forgiveness also with reference to the Bible where God said we must forgive our trespassers. By fulfilling all these things the poet promises the listener / reader everything the earth has to offer but also that all these guidelines or pre-requisites in life will make him a man. By using the words "my son", the poet does not necessarily mean biological son but it could be him referring to a younger generation. I feel that the brilliant use of simple language in the poem really signposts the values and key/main message in the poem. I feel that the poet has a strong longing or belief in reaching a level of self-actualisation in one's life (As mentioned in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs). I see the poet's brilliant explanation of human expectations and believe that he gives it as advice instead of an ultimatum to scare the listener. I believe that the poet is trying to tell of the importance of responsibilities for the actions one takes for actions. I believe that this brilliant writing greatly describes key aspects of being a man in the eyes of the poet.

#### Student 3-FL

In this writing, I will explain how the language use of the poet (Rudyard Kipling) contributes to my view of his values and belief system, relating specifically to the inspirational advisory in the poem entitled 'IF'. From my understanding and interpretation, the poem 'IF' serves as a guideline as to what the best kind of attitude to have is. 'IF' portrays the possible challenging situations that all humans might come across. For instance, in stanza one "If you can keep your head when all about you / Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,". This shows me that the poet advises us to stay calm in situations where it seems as though the world is going to end. So therefore, the poem is structured in such a way where the poet proposes which way one should react, and thereafter, states the possible situation you



could find yourself in. for instance, in stanza one: "If you can wait and not be tired of waiting" gives you the advice first, which is that you should be patient, and thereafter gives you the situation that is challenging; which is that you could become tired of waiting for things to go right, on to improve. The poet uses very basic, easy to understand language. Also, I feel that the manner in which the poet advises the readers, is done very sincerely, as if I know the poet personally. My reason for this is that the advice given seems to be offered, not enforced upon me. It really feels as though the poet genuinely wants to advise me in making wiser decisions about life's potential challenges.

2. Read the following unseen poem and then answer the questions that follow:

### Cathedral Builders

They climbed on sketchy ladders towards God,  
With winch and pulley hoisted hewn rock into heaven,  
Inhabited sky with hammers, defied gravity,  
Defied stone, took up God's house to meet Him.

And came down to their suppers and small beer;  
Every night slept, lay with their smelly wives,  
Quarrelled and cuffed the children, lied,  
Spat, sang, were happy or unhappy.

And every day took to the ladders again; Impeded  
the rights of way of another summer's Swallows,  
grew greyer, shakier, became less inclined To fix a  
neighbour's roof of a fine evening.

Saw naves sprout arches, clerestories soar,  
Cursed the loud fancy glaziers for their luck,  
Somehow escaped the plague, got rheumatism,  
Decided it was time to give it up.

To leave the spire to others; stood in the crowd  
Well back from the vestment at the consecration,  
Envied the fat bishop his warm boots,  
Cocked up a squint eye and said, I bloody did that'.  
John Ormond

### Questions:

2.1. Rewrite the poem as a first person narrative (simple prose) in which you are the Cathedral Builder or the experiencer of all that the poem speaks of. Alternatively, you could write the narrative as an observer of the Cathedral Builders. (10)

#### Student 1- AVT

As I start my work for the day I reflect on what it is I am doing. Cathedral building is not seen to be of significant importance and yet I am conducting a service to my society by doing this sacred work. One fine day when my work is done this place which is being built will become a place of spirituality and meaning to many citizens, but until then I remain a Cathedral builder with an unfinished task ahead of. As I go about my work each day I come to realise that we are actually attempting the impossible by trying to defy gravity whilst reaching for heaven. To the world our work sounds ideal and without any flaws, but yet we have to deal with the ups and downs of life on a frequent basis. We come across joy and happiness as well as pain and sorrow. All of life's flaws and achievements – ever changing. As I remain a Cathedral builder year in and year out I start to find less enjoyment in my work as I am not often given the opportunity to enjoy the good that life offers whilst all of our hard work is in vain as glaziers receive acknowledgement for it in the end. As the years passed by and I survived the worst that life had to offer, I was finally dragged down as a result of illness. This furthermore affected my ability to remain a Cathedral builder. In the end it does not matter that we have made a mark upon history or that it is not appreciated by the world, but that we will forever remain Cathedral builders. Nothing more and nothing less.

#### Student 2- AT

I climbed on sketchy ladders towards God, with winch and pulley, I was hoisted with my rock into the heavens, I inhabited the sky with hammers, I defied gravity and stone as I was taken up God's house to meet him. When I returned my supper and small beer awaited. Every night I slept, laid with my smelly wife, quarrelled and cuffed the children, lied, spat, and were happy or unhappy. I am only human after all. Then again we took our ladders, impeded the rights of way of another summer's swallows. I grew greyer and shakier. I had no energy to even fix my neighbour's roof. The cathedral building has

really taking its toll on my body. I saw naves sprout arches, clerestories sour, I cursed loud fancy glaziers for their luck. Somehow I escaped the plague, “I’m still alive, but gout rheumatism instead. This was where I had to give up my job as a builder. We left the building of the spire to the others, not by choice but because of our health. We stood in the crowd, far back from the vestment at the consecration of the body and blood. I envied the fat bishop for his own warm boots, I cocked up a squint eye and said to myself, I bloody did that’.

### Student 3-FL

When I started building this Cathedral, I felt so motivated. I really wanted to help build this spiritual place, this holy place of worship. Somehow, as I went higher on the ladder, it was as if I was somehow higher, closer to God in heaven. I felt, and still feel good about my contribution in building this cathedral and I so proudly can boast about it to those I converse with. Of course, to others, I just seemed as an ordinary worker, just ‘the guy working on the cathedral.’ Did people ever, for one moment consider the great job I did? Not only in terms of quality, but for the greater good of human kind. I built a place of worship, that will forever remain on this earth, used by all to worship God. Every night, I returned to the normality of my life, just like you do too. I returned home to my wife and kids, had the regular beer with my meal, dealing with the kids naughtiness. At times there was happiness, and sadness too. But the next morning, without fail, I returned to work, to build the cathedral. As I returned to work each day, I somehow lost a sense of motivation that was present before. I just felt less excited about my job. It was soon moving from avocation to just a vocation, a way to put bread on the table. Towards the near end of building the cathedral, the finishes touches just had to be done. People soon forgot the hard work that I had done, I LACKED APPRECIATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT. My hard work was overlooked, and I was just known as “The Cathedral Builder”. However, despite this, I remain proud of what I have done, and I’m sure God is proud of me, and appreciates my work.

I believe that the illustrative stretches of discourse presented so far in this section will /can help explain how in learning to respond students feel unthreatened to use their alternate discourses of reckoning. This should be seen as their manifestations of voice, agency and subjectivity underlying our socially-aligned view of EIL competence.

## **Conclusion: Anchoring our Resolve**

Our endorsement of a constructivist view of competence should help us challenge the main stream SLA's preoccupation with the development and measurement of competence in language as a linguistic code rather than a phenomenon in which the learners cross the border of their first language into a second in order to reconstruct their selves and world. The constructivist perspective that I have referred to in this paper should be viewed as a retelling of the story of students' reading and writing as a way of experiencing the experience. The following explanation of Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.160) can illustrate this perspective as well the position I uphold:

We imagine, therefore, that in the construction of narratives of experience there is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story and reliving a life story. As researchers, we are always engaged in living, telling, reliving and retelling our own stories. Our narratives of experience as Jean and Michael are always ongoing ones. We live our stories in our experiences and tell stories of those experiences and modify them through retelling and reliving them. The research participants with whom we engage also live tell, relive and retell their stories.

The above stated views are synonymous with the manifestations of our students' agency, voice and subjectivities. Therefore, I argue that I (as practitioner/ researcher) am not obliged to write a narrative 'in which everything is said to everyone' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p.349) Such is my stance which debunks the atemporal, objective, context-free affirmations that traditional SLA theorists have always favoured and touted much to the detriment of our students' reconstructions/border-crossings that underlie their agency, voice and subjectivity.

It is these reconstructions of our students that can serve as reliable indicators of their competence and definitive markers of their ever-expanding voice, agency and subjecthood. It is only with such a resolute stance can we check and counter 'the prescriptivism and essentialism' (Canagarajah, 1999, p.196) that have harmed our educational practices of language teaching as well as stultified our students and us. If we believe in the same way as the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe (1975) and the Srilankan poet Yasmine Gooneratne (1971) believed that 'English is expansive, malleable and neutral enough to accommodate diverse sensibilities' (Canagarajah, 1999; p.177), then we should initiate/propose methods to discern how/why our students tap into the limitless meaning possibilities available in English (given its

fluidity/flexibility) for their multiple meaning constructions in using it. I have voiced some specific strategies in this regard in an earlier section of this paper. In maximizing our students' competence through their voice, agency and subjecthood, we discover how we can maximize our teaching acumen by fostering our voice, agency and subjecthood as their teachers. Such a bi-directionality can provide a more definitive as well as humanizing understanding of our students' competence in EIL. In sum and spirit, this can act as rich underpinnings to our research practices with which we will be amply equipped to propose student-centered conceptualizations of competence which would by pointing out how their resistance to the dominant discourse of English can provide the stimuli and synergy for them to foster their voice, agency and intersubjectivities in developing themselves. In light of this,

“.... it is difficult for any institution to enforce its own desired meanings and thought. The hybridity of language enables subjects to represent alternate meanings denied by dominant institution, if they can negotiate the inherent tensions strategically’ (Canagarajah 1999, p.185).

Thus, maximizing our students' competence in EIL would be contingent on our using socially-informed and socially-attuned approaches to fostering their voice, agency and intersubjectivity underlying their subjecthood.

In this regard, I hope that the issues and insights presented in this paper would prompt a definite shift of mind-set and departure from those deadening institutional practices that have precluded us from engaging empathetically as well as edifyingly with our students. As Kern observes (2000, p.116):

All interpretation is partial because all competence is partial. Foreign language readers need not see themselves as hopelessly handicapped by their ‘outsideness’ with respect to the texts they read. On the contrary, their very outsideness can provide them with insights that would not necessarily occur to ‘native’ readers. When learners feel that the knowledge they can bring to a particular text is illegitimate or inappropriate, they will feel like keeping their interpretations to themselves. What teachers need to do, therefore, is to motivate learners to share their varied interpretations in order to make them aware of how all reading is mediated experience, and that many factors will contribute to the particular ways in which that mediation takes place during a given act of reading.

Nurturing our students' voices will nurture our own voices. ‘Nurturing our own voices releases the censorious hold of “science writing” on our consciousness, as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, p.349). Otherwise, we run the risk of being labelled as “institutional executioners rather than enlivening and

empowering educators” by our students.

Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the Wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the Knowledge we have lost in information?

***Choruses from the Rock, T.S. Eliot***

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